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ART. V. — CRITICAL NOTICES.

1. — *Universal Pronouncing Dictionary of Biography and Mythology.*

By J. THOMAS, M. D. Philadelphia : J. B. Lippincott & Co. Two vols. Royal 8vo. 1871.

THE want of a good modern biographical dictionary in English has long been felt, — a work adapted to popular use in schools, libraries, reading-rooms, and private houses, not too extended, and so too costly, nor on the other hand too limited in its range, and too meagre in its statements, — something between the two monumental works of Michaud and Hoefer, and the handy English volume not long ago revised and edited by Mr. William A. Wheeler. But such a work is one of the hardest to prepare. A dictionary of words or of places, or even of the arts and sciences, seems to us an easier task, for while these works require as much labor and learning as the compendium of biography, the latter involves a decision of many questions of fame and fortune, a perpetual dealing with prejudices and rivalries, an incessant effort to ascertain and exhibit the world's estimate of all sorts of characters, from Adam to the last celebrity.

The author who allows himself some freedom in the discussion of certain lives, and yet restricts himself to the limit of one or two volumes in the aggregate, assumes a bold, delicate, and ill-paid undertaking. From the very nature of the case, he cannot satisfy conflicting schools in theology, politics, history, and science. Let him be ever so guarded he cannot expect to avoid censure. It is doubtful whether he can even satisfy himself in his own varying moods. The highest reward he can expect, beyond the consciousness of fidelity and industry, is the verdict of historical scholars, bibliographers, and antiquaries, who can appreciate the enormous difficulties under which he has toiled, that the work is well done and worthy the confidence and acceptance of the public.

Such praise we are sure will be heartily accorded to Dr. Thomas, for the Dictionary of Biography and Mythology, on which he has expended many years of expert and untiring diligence. He is already favorably known to scholars by the "Pronouncing Gazetteer," which is commonly quoted as "Lippincott's," and by his Pronouncing Tables of Proper Names, appended to the latest revision of the Webster Dictionary. We might easily adduce other evidence of his fitness for this new task, but we are sure that he himself will prefer to have attention directed to the work itself, with a candid scrutiny of its quality.

The real character of such works as this is not at once apparent. The essential merits and defects are both to be discovered by long familiarity, by reference to the pages in different moods and for different purposes, and especially by observing the service which the volumes render to the average reader when he consults them. It may be taken for granted that the specialist in any branch of learning will sometimes be disappointed in the treatment of authorities whom he regards as of the first rank, or in the degree of prominence bestowed on men whose influence has been strong in very restricted paths. It must also be expected in a work so comprehensive as a *Biographical Dictionary*, that some statements will be given as facts from which scholars will dissent, and that some errors of dates and names will creep in, and some important incidents or occurrences will escape the compiler's notice. It is not fair to bring in hypercriticism here. Knowing that the author is competent, conscientious, and painstaking, we are much more interested in ascertaining the peculiar characteristics of his work, and the degree of success which has generally attended the execution of his plan.

We begin with the aspect of the volumes. The page is a large-sized royal octavo, almost a quarto, printed in two columns, with good margins, and clear, open typography, the name at the head of every article having a broad, black-faced letter, which makes reference easy. The bibliographical notes are given in fine type at the close of the articles. The ink, paper, stitching, and other mechanical qualities are excellent. Copies may be obtained, bound in one volume or in two, at the buyer's choice. Scarcely any abbreviations are employed,—not even for words of constant recurrence, like *born*, *died*, *son*, *father*, etc.,—but the style of each notice is clear and readable, free from amplification, as a general rule, and yet not curt or abrupt. Frequently toward the close of a sketch an apposite quotation is made from a writer of literary distinction, but the author of the volume rarely allows himself any rhetorical freedom. It would, perhaps, have been better if the epithets “distinguished,” “celebrated,” “eminent,” “learned,” and the like, which so often succeed the name, had been uniformly omitted.

Among the distinctive features of these volumes the author would doubtless give special prominence to the pronunciation. On this he has expended a vast amount of inquiry and study. As a remarkable instance of his zeal, it deserves to be mentioned that, in view of the difficulties connected with the English transliteration and utterance of Oriental names, Dr. Thomas went abroad and spent nearly two years in the East studying the rudiments of several Asiatic tongues, including Arabic, Persian, Sanskrit, and Hindoostanee. The results of this

“pronouncing voyage,” unique, we presume, in literary annals, are seen on almost every page.

There are only three courses, he remarks, which can be pursued in speaking foreign names,—to blunder over them haphazard like a school-boy, to pronounce them according to the rules of English orthoepy, or to give as nearly as possible the pronunciation adopted by well-educated people in the land to which the name belongs. It is the last method which he follows, in accordance with good sense and good usage both in this country and abroad. But likewise, in accordance with good sense and good usage, he makes some important exceptions. Celebrated names like Confucius, Kosciusko, Cortez, Cervantes, Luther, Petrarch, and so on, which have acquired an established English pronunciation, he would leave undisturbed in their English utterance.

The principles which govern the sounds of the more important European and Asiatic languages are elaborately stated in the Introduction to the first volume, and then each proper name, as it is introduced in its alphabetical place, has affixed to it an indication of the appropriate sounds, expressed with accents, marks of quantity, peculiar type, and modified spelling. By these four helps the author has been very successful, as it seems to us, in exhibiting his conception of the pronunciation of almost every name.

The next point to which we refer is the comprehensiveness of these volumes. Mythological names are included, and in addition to those of Greece and Rome, special attention has been given to those of Norse and Hindoo origin,—a feature which will be generally acceptable. The biographical sketches refer to persons of all countries and callings, living as well as dead. English and American names, of the second or third rank in importance, are much more commonly given than those of like consequence in other countries. Chinese, Hindoo, and Arabic names receive fair attention, proportioned to the supposed requirements of an ordinary English reader. Most of the historic names of American Indians are given, though there are some noteworthy omissions. Men of literary renown, as a class, are perhaps better represented than statesmen and generals. The greatest deficiencies which we have noted are among the scholars in natural science. Some of the most distinguished are very slightly spoken of (Darwin, for example, whose name is on every one's lips), or are wholly omitted.

After running through the work, having in hand various lists of persons no longer living, selected not for their fame, but for their worth in different departments of human activity, we have been surprised, on the whole, to see how rarely any name for which we thus looked is omitted. Among living men of distinction we should include many

whom the author does not, and *vice versa*, but in this there can be no positive standard.

The great comprehensiveness of this work is accomplished by giving, in most instances, very brief sketches. We open at random to pages 428, 429, Brand — Bray, where we find in the four columns sixty-eight different black-letter headings (a few of them cross-references), and the longest one of the sketches is but seventeen lines. This selection is not an average, we admit, neither is it extreme. But the dry, annalistic monotony which would result from such condensation, if it were not relieved, is compensated by the elaborate sketches which are frequently interspersed. To men of world-wide influence ample space is given, and some of these character sketches are noteworthy examples of condensed, spirited, biographical narrative. For example, between six and seven columns are devoted to Julius Cæsar, fourteen columns to Napoleon Bonaparte, four columns to Alexander the Great, seven and a half to Washington, five to Wellington, and so on; but Charlemagne, on the contrary, who is certainly to be regarded as a great man raised up for a great emergency, the representative of the transition from the Roman Empire to the modern European state, is restricted to two thirds of a column. Special prominence is given to the leaders of religious opinion, Confucius, Gautama Boodha, and Mohammed being elaborately treated. The article Brahma and Brahmanism is also very ample; Zoroaster is rapidly passed over. Luther, Calvin, George Fox, Wesley, Swedenborg, receive just appreciation; but some of the great leaders of the Latin Church in the Middle Ages are too briefly mentioned, — such men, for example, as Gregory the Great, Gregory the Seventh or Hildebrand, Innocent the Third, and others, by whose power the ecclesiastical system of Rome was so firmly built up. Indeed, with our estimate of the influences by which modern civilization in Europe was brought out of the ruins of the ancient Empire, we should have expected to find fuller articles upon many of the mediæval worthies, Charlemagne, Alfred, Louis of France, Barbarossa, and the rest. Among the articles on literary men those on Goethe and Voltaire are quite noteworthy. That on Dante falls far short of the importance of the man; and that on Shakespeare seems to us ill-balanced by the preponderance given to the new theory of Miss Bacon and Mr. Holmes. Homer and Virgil are not elaborately treated; Plato, and especially Cicero, receive just honor. Most of the longer articles are not only prepared with great care as to the facts which they state, but are written in a clear and easy style, sometimes with great ability, and often with the introduction of fit selections from the writings of other biographers and critics.

Presuming that the Dictionary of Dr. Thomas is to assume a standard place as a book of reference in American libraries and schools, we have no doubt that the plates will from time to time be revised, and that a select appendix will by and by be necessary. We have detected some needless defects in the notices of distinguished Americans, many of which would be obviated by a careful collation of the Dictionary with the triennials of Harvard and Yale, the West Point Register of General Cullum, the official registers of the United States army and navy, and other like manuals. For example, the career of General A. A. Humphreys, chief of engineers in the United States army, is very inadequately stated, and no mention is made of his great work on the Mississippi River, one of the most valuable of American contributions to science; Professor Bache's work might, within the same space, be much better delineated; General Halleck's work on International Law ought not to be omitted from his record; Professor Weir's career as a painter is made more noteworthy by the fact that he has been so long a professor at West Point. All this would be obvious by referring to Cullum's admirable volumes. The triennials of American colleges, when published, are edited with great care, and at least obviate in most cases the necessity of using the word "about" in mentioning the dates of graduation and of death. It seems remarkable that Dr. Lieber's removal to New York, Professor Botta's residence in this country, Dr. Palfrey's third volume of New England History, the full summary of Mr. Peabody's benefactions, the memoir of General Nathaniel Lyon, the appointment of Professor Peirce to the head of the United States Coast Survey, the time when Admiral Foote entered the navy, and some other well-known facts, should have escaped Dr. Thomas's attention; but these are trifling slips, hardly worth mentioning, and quite pardonable in one who has done so much good work in the study.

On the whole, after many hours of examination, and in different moods, we have formed a favorable opinion of the labors of Dr. Thomas. The blemishes to which we have just referred are only such as are natural when a single man covers so wide a field; indeed, they could not be wholly avoided by an association of scholars or a corps of collaborators. They are not serious enough to affect our general estimate of the work. On the contrary, its excellence is more and more apparent as we prolong our scrutiny. For fulness of names, judiciousness of treatment, accuracy of statement, and freedom from the bias of this or that school, it rivals any work of the kind in English. As a combination of compactness and completeness it is especially commendable. For the thoroughness with which the work is carried to the end,

when so many compilers "give out" in the early letters of the alphabet, the author deserves especial praise. His volumes will merit a constant place by the side of the dictionary and the gazetteer in every reference library. It would be especially desirable that an edition on a little thinner paper, at least at a somewhat lower price, could be offered for the use of schools. Such volumes as these are invaluable in every class in history, and would doubtless be widely introduced.

- 2.—*The Life of Charles Dickens.* BY JOHN FORSTER. Vol. I. 1812–1842. London: Chapman and Hall. 1872. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co.

THERE is no better reading for an idle hour than a volume of memoirs or a good biography, and we presume that by this time everybody who could buy, borrow, or take out the book has read through the first volume of the "*Life of Dickens*," by his friend, John Forster, who has made biography in some sort his line in literature. It is safe to say everybody, because no author of his generation so attracted all classes of readers as Dickens. The characters he sent out into the world between 1837 and his visit to America in 1842 were so new, vivid, and amusing, that they became actual existences to thousands. And although the fate common to all has overtaken many of them, and Kenwigses, Bumbles, Smikes, and the rest of that kind have vanished or are perceptibly vanishing into the covers of the books they sprang from, most of us remember the spell they laid upon us, and many are under it still.

There were few external incidents in Dickens's life, apart from his wonderful literary successes, and those recorded in this volume were known already, except the episode of the blacking warehouse. But some extracts from letters written to Forster during Dickens's first visit to this country are new and entertaining. He had let the world see in his "Notes" that the progress in the United States which began with effusive affection on the part of the nation and the "nation's guest" ended in something like disgust,—what with his ill-timed copyright speeches and the irritation produced in him by American habits, manners, and intrusiveness. Our national trait of looking upon a distinguished man as in some sort public property, as we do upon a public house or a public conveyance, which we have a right to make use of when it suits our pleasure, was never more strongly exemplified than in his case. In these letters he pours out his feelings fresh and warm from the heart. His language is strong, but he means every word he